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INFO RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS KINSHASA 001775

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E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [PREL](#) [ETTC](#) [KPAO](#) [UNSC](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: EXECUTIVE ORDER BLOCKING PROPERTY OF  
INDIVIDUALS CONTRIBUTING TO CONFLICT IN D.R. CONGO

¶1. (U) Media and public reaction was generally positive to the October 27 Executive Order blocking the assets of seven international arms traffickers and warlords, including renegade Congolese general Laurent Nkunda and Ignace Murwanashyaka, the president of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The directive, made public on October 31, two days after presidential runoff elections in the DRC, was also welcomed by the DROC government.

¶2. (U) The independent daily "La Reference Plus," November 2 edition, commented that President George Bush wants to get personally involved in efforts to restore peace to the Congo. According to this paper, President Bush is committed to reducing drastically the room to maneuver of "people who have been fully involved in the chaos, unrest and wars that have plagued the Congo."

¶3. (U) The pro-Kabila daily "L'Observateur," November 2 issue, regarded the White House order as being George Bush's resolve to neutralize those who are obstacles to peace efforts in the Great Lakes region, including the DRC, to end the plundering of the DRC's natural resources, and to stop trafficking in illicit arms in the region. The paper noted U.S. commitment to support the momentum toward peace and reconstruction in the DRC.

¶4. (U) Dissenting commentary appeared in the pro-opposition daily "La Tempete des Tropiques," November 2 edition, which saw the order as being a subliminal message to President Kabila and Jean-Pierre Bemba, his challenger in the run-off presidential election, warning the eventual loser not to resort to violence to contest unfavorable election results. A cartoon published in the pro-opposition "Le Phare," November 2 issue, advocated a more inclusive spectrum of sanctions that would also affect economic criminals.

¶5. (U) The Association Africaine de Defense des Droits de l'Homme (ASADHO), a Congolese rights group, was cited in the November 3 edition of "La Reference-Plus" as depicting President Bush's decision as a strong and clear signal to all political leaders to avoid opposing the DRC peace process. ASADHO also urged the international community to bring all criminal perpetrators to justice.

¶6. (U) The pro-Kabila daily "L'Avenir," November 3 edition, called the directive a cosmetic decision meant to distract the Congolese people's attention from Laurent Nkunda's unhampered potential for destabilization. "L'Avenir" urged the USG to go further and include the dissident general in its list of most wanted international terrorists. The paper pointed out that the best way for the U.S. to neutralize Nkunda is to arrest, try and condemn him.

¶7. (U) Henry Mova Sakanyi, the government spokesman and minister for press and information, was quoted by the Associated Press (and picked up by the "International Herald Tribune" on November 1) as welcoming the international community's increased recognition of its responsibility in ending the conflict in Eastern DRC. He called on other foreign countries to follow the American example.

¶8. (U) The Embassy answered inquiries on November 1 from Congolese radio stations Tropicana FM, Radio Okapi (Kinshasa and Goma), as well as the Associated Press.

¶9. (U) On November 7, the Ambassador taped an interview with MONUC television on the Executive Order, the transcript of which also appeared on the MONUC website. He described the Executive Order as being the USG's implementation of sanctions adopted against the seven individuals by the UN Security Council, which was the responsibility of all UN member states. He stated further that the Executive Order should have a positive effect on the DRC's stability, which is its intention. The Ambassador's remarks were reprinted in the November 8 issue of independent daily "Le Potential."

¶10. (U) It is worth noting the reaction of the FDLR leadership, who publicly characterized the sanctions as being unjust and needless, claiming they are not implicated in arms trafficking and conflict in the Great Lakes region. Khawa Mandro, former president of the PUSIC militia and one of the seven targeted individuals serving a life sentence in northeastern Congo, denied having assets abroad.

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